



Mayor Joyce Craig

2022 State of the City Address

Good afternoon,

I want to start by thanking everyone at the Chamber for hosting this event – and thank you Scott for moderating. It's great to be back in person with you all.

I'd also like to thank Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health, Alumni Ventures and New Hampshire Healthy Families for sponsoring today's event.

I always enjoy being at the Institute of Politics. In fact, this is where we held my last in-person State of the City back on March 11th, 2020.

The challenges we faced over the past two years were immense, and the impact of COVID-19 cannot be overstated. It's stolen the lives of friends, colleagues, and family members. It upended livelihoods, altered childhoods, and left a lasting, emotional toll. The pandemic tested every aspect of how we live and work.

But through it all, we persevered, one step at a time. And we adapted to COVID-19 in ways that have enhanced our lives and our community.

As we continue forward, we know things will be different. But, I know we'll come out of this stronger, because that's what Queen City residents do. We put in the work.

To the residents of Manchester, I stand before you, honored to be your Mayor. And I'm excited about what the future holds.

We know the best way to positively impact the future of our city is through a strong educational system. But when the pandemic hit, it increased inequities among our students, including lack of computer access, food insecurity, and housing instability. So, we took immediate action. We met families where they were, delivering personal devices to every student that needed one, and holding vaccine clinics at neighborhood schools. Through the Fuel Our Families initiative, led by interim Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Gillis, we delivered over 200,000 meals to students and families across the city.

And despite the challenges, we made progress. We implemented a new reading curriculum, which is already having a positive impact on student achievement. We expanded summer learning opportunities, integrated social emotional learning into classrooms, and increased professional development.

Today, we're focusing on recovery, stabilization and growth. We're increasing tutoring and support services, improving access to devices, addressing learning gaps created during the pandemic and will soon implement a new science and social studies curriculum.

Manchester Proud is helping us continue this work, thanks in large part to many of you. With their support, we hired the District's first Chief Equity Officer, Tina Philibotte. Over the past nine months, she's made progress in creating an equitable and inclusive District, and will release her Equity Blueprint for the District in the coming months. And under her direction, the Board of School Committee recently approved funding for four community organizations to create positive school outcomes for BIPOC, immigrant and refugee families.

In addition, Manchester Proud recently hired a Community Partnerships Coordinator, Aimee Kereage, to align community partners and resources in support of our public schools. We launched a new community portal to connect local resources, have a renewed focus on community engagement, and are increasing internship and mentorship programs for our students.

And we're expanding workforce development opportunities.

I'm proud to announce in the coming weeks, we'll launch The Manchester Promise, a program in partnership with Southern New Hampshire University, Manchester Community College and Duet. This program will enable Manchester public school students, who have been negatively impacted by the pandemic and who normally wouldn't have the opportunity, to attend college debt-free.

By increasing access to higher education, we're investing in the long term success of our students, establishing foundations to fill local jobs, and encouraging them to stay in our community after they graduate.

There's a lot of hope, and a lot of work to be done. We now have the opportunity to hire a superintendent with the leadership, vision, and communication skills to continue our work in increasing student achievement and leading the district forward. Community involvement is pivotal in the long-term success of this hire, so I encourage you to participate in this process.

We're building a future for the Manchester School District to ensure all students in our public schools have equal access to everything from academic courses to extra-curricular activities – reflecting the needs of our community in all we do.

And this includes improving the overall health and well-being of our community.

I'm tremendously grateful for the hard work of the Manchester Health Department, led by Director Anna Thomas. During the pandemic, they stepped up and put in the work to keep our community safe, establishing a COVID-19 Hotline answering 11,000 requests for information, investigating over 30,000 cases of COVID-19, and providing over 25,000 vaccinations at over 250 clinics.

As we move past the pandemic, the Health Department, in partnership with Catholic Medical Center, Elliot Health Systems, and Dartmouth-Hitchcock, is updating the city's Community Needs Assessment. This will evaluate everything from income inequality to life expectancy. We'll use this updated information to target the root cause of poor health in our city, and guide us in establishing interventions.

And we're welcoming others to help with this work. **I'm pleased to share for the first time in Manchester's history, the Health Department will be collaborating with the New Hampshire National Guard to provide essential services for Manchester residents. This may include adult oral health care, medical screenings in priority neighborhoods, and home health visits for elderly residents.**

In partnership with the Manchester Police Department, they established a Community Response Unit to provide support to people who have recently overdosed. Over the past six months, they've reached 153 people, connecting 60% of them with services or treatment.

And utilizing American Rescue Plan funds, the Health and Police Departments will soon establish a team of Community Health Workers to assist MPD and respond to check condition calls for service related to health, social and economic issues.

These innovative approaches to public health and policing are showing positive results for our city. By continuing to think beyond traditional policing, we're striving to make Manchester a healthier and safer place.

Thanks to the work of the Manchester Police Department, led by Chief Al Aldenberg, we've seen a decrease in violent crime. We know there's more work to do, and our officers and detectives are working day and night implementing evidence-based crime reduction programs.

We know residents are concerned about gun crimes in the city. Gun violence is unacceptable, and I want to reiterate that the safety of our residents and visitors is our top priority. The MPD is focused on reducing gun crimes, implementing new tactics to address this concerning issue. They established a community-focused gun crime problem solving team, they're holding bi-weekly meetings with internal stakeholders and law enforcement partners, and have deployed additional walking patrols to increase police presence and community engagement in neighborhoods. And their efforts are yielding results – in 2021, MPD seized 81 illegal guns off the streets.

In addition, MPD is working with the Public Works Department and Planning and Community Development Department utilizing crime prevention through environmental design – addressing neighborhood cleanliness, lighting, graffiti and park safety.

And we're focused on eliminating blight in our city. In 2021, we identified 15 hazardous residential buildings, and in the last 12 months, we've addressed them all. Seven have been fully redeveloped and occupied, four have been demolished, and four are in the process of being redeveloped.

Studies show increasing urban green spaces and eliminating blight benefits the health of a community -- leading to lower mortality rates, decreased crime and lower levels of stress.

For years this work has been done ad hoc, and I'm glad we now have the opportunity to coordinate efforts and optimize investments using ARPA funds to increase the quality of life for residents across Manchester.

Thanks to the Department of Public Works, led by Kevin Sheppard, we're making investments in infrastructure – repairing over 183 miles of roads and sidewalks in the past four years, and improving parks, trails and green spaces.

Our work to improve our city is ongoing, and in 2022, we'll complete the restoration of the Veteran's Park monument, open the skateboard half-pipe at Rock Rimmon, install new playgrounds at Pine Island Park, Enright Park and Northwest Elementary, and begin construction on the extension of the South Manchester Rail Trail. And soon, we'll have three new Park Rangers in our parks and trails.

During my State of the City in 2020, I announced Manchester is committed to its status as an environmental pioneer in New Hampshire, and set a goal of reducing CO2 emissions 50 percent by 2030.

Today, I'm proud to announce that in just two years, we have exceeded our goal. Manchester's newest solar array, plus building and energy efficiencies, have helped us realize a 58.4% reduction in CO2 emissions.

And we're not done. The City is helping to support New Hampshire-based renewable energy projects, we're exploring opportunities to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels through power purchase agreements, and are investigating the possibility of constructing wind turbines.

Manchester is setting an example for how other municipalities can think creatively and dream big. And this proactive work is paying off.

In November of last year, Manchester was awarded a \$25 million RAISE Grant by the USDOT to revitalize the South Millyard and South Elm Street area – the largest grant awarded to a municipality. With this grant, we'll reduce traffic congestion, increase biking and walking trails, add a pedestrian bridge over Granite Street and create development opportunities throughout the South Elm Street corridor. We're looking forward to further guidance so we can begin this work as soon as possible.

We were also named as a finalist for the Economic Development Administration's Build Back Better Regional Challenge Phase 1, one of only 60 finalists out of over 550 applicants.

Over the last decade, Manchester has established itself as a leader in the field of regenerative medicine and BioFabrication. The City partnered with several world-class institutions located in our community, including ARMI, UNH, SNHU, and the Manchester Airport to grow the regenerative manufacturing industry, expand pathways to higher education for Biofabrication and aeronautics, and create new, high-quality jobs that are accessible to members of our community.

We submitted our Phase 2 application on March 15th, which, if granted, would bring upwards of \$100 million of federal investment into the region, accelerate job creation in tissue engineering and advanced aerial mobility, and has the potential to create more than 20,000 jobs.

This grant would also fund a pedestrian bridge over the Merrimack River connecting the Millyard to the West Side.

We're not only applying for grants, we're providing them to our community.

Using ARPA funds, we launched two exciting programs – the Community Event and Activation Grant and the Small Business Recovery Grant. Both programs provide up to

\$10,000 to increase community events, expand tourism and help businesses recover from COVID-19. Our residents know best what our city needs to thrive, and with these programs, we're empowering them to be proactive and make a positive impact.

And for the first time in over two years, the City's Economic Development Department is back, with Director Jodie Nazaka, and soon we'll be hiring a business liaison. This department will be instrumental as we continue to recover from the pandemic, assisting businesses and planning for the future.

In the coming weeks, we'll issue an RFP to update the City's marketing and branding strategy, working with the state tourism board to continue solidifying Manchester's place as a top destination in New Hampshire.

We're also working to create stronger connections with businesses, unify departments to increase economic opportunities, and bolster activities and pride throughout our city.

There are many exciting events coming up. The St. Patrick's Day Parade is this Sunday, March 26th, the Fisher Cat's home opener is on April 12th and after a two-year hiatus, we're bringing back the Taco Tour on May 5th.

But, one thing that's been missing is hockey – Manchester is a hockey town. I'm pleased to announce that I'm establishing an exploratory committee to work to bring hockey back to the Queen City.

We will continue supporting initiatives and events that will encourage people to live, visit and invest in our city.

And some of this work is already underway at the Manchester-Boston Regional Airport, one of the most important economic engines in our state. Led by Director Ted Kitchens, the airport team is focused on growth opportunities.

As the Airport recovers from the pandemic, we're seeing increased ridership, with a 240% increase in passenger traffic. Plus, last year we added Spirit Airlines, the first new airline in 17 years.

In addition, the Airport is partnering with Chambers in the region to create the first-ever business consortium to enhance air service. They've also secured their first-ever Small Community Air Service Development Grant to provide marketing support.

Cargo growth has been strong due to the rise in e-commerce. To meet the demand, a new 64,000 square foot cargo facility is under construction that will more than double cargo warehouse capacity.

The convenience, value and service of the Manchester-Boston Regional Airport is unmatched, so when you choose to fly, fly Manchester!

In addition to increasing service to our airport, we know we need to expand public transportation options. It's time to bring commuter rail to Manchester. We've worked closely with the New Hampshire Department of Transportation and identified areas for a rail platform and layover area. This reality is closer than ever before, with \$66 Billion in the federal infrastructure bill earmarked for rail projects. Expanded commuter rail will increase

new economic development opportunities, attract a youthful workforce, expand transit options, reduce traffic and significantly decrease greenhouse gas emissions. While it's estimated that we're four to six years away, please know I am committed to moving this project forward.

We're also working to expand transportation options with the Manchester Transit Authority, led by Director (and school bus driver) Mike Whitten. Together, he and his team are continually working to improve bus service to better meet the needs of our residents.

Back in 2019, we increased the frequency of Route 8 along South Willow Street, our most popular bus route, so it ran every 30 minutes instead of every hour. When the pandemic hit, MTA saw its ridership drop 25% – except on Route 8, which increased 9%. It's a powerful example of the impact expanded frequency can have on ridership.

The City and MTA are committed to bring innovative forms of public transportation to our community – including micro-transit. I'm pleased to share that we're in the process of piloting a program for on-demand bus service, and hope to launch it in Fiscal Year 23.

As we continue to plan for future generations, we're also working to make a positive impact for our seniors. We were recently named an AARP Age-Friendly Community and will soon have a community health worker dedicated to assisting seniors across Manchester. We've also added funds into our Affordable Housing Trust to provide grants for seniors so they can stay in their homes as they age.

Housing is one of New Hampshire's biggest challenges, and we're focused on increasing affordable housing locally. We've allocated nearly \$8 million dollars in federal funds to develop new affordable housing. This includes \$2.3 million to construct 48 units at Kelley Falls, renovate 101 NeighborWorks units in the Elm Street Brownstones and Straw Mansion Apartments and develop three studio apartments for young, at-risk adults in partnership with Waypoint.

We established the Manchester Housing Commission, an official city standing board that will monitor our housing stock and make recommendations to increase affordable housing options.

And, this is just the beginning. There are hundreds of both market rate and affordable units in the works. The city is finalizing proposals for over 450 new mixed-income apartments to be built on two underutilized city-owned parking lots. We're also developing creative solutions for workforce housing and working with MHRA to offer incentives for landlords.

There's also an exciting proposal coming forward to build 160 new, affordable units at the former police station on Chestnut Street. It will be coming before the Zoning Board in April.

With the City's 10-Year Master Plan approved, we're now updating zoning regulations, to better provide housing options across the city – the first time widespread zoning regulations have been updated in decades.

We know increasing supportive and affordable housing is key to reducing homelessness, and we're dedicating more resources to help those in need.

Utilizing federal funds, we hired the City's first Director of Homeless Initiatives, Schonna Green, and in a short period of time, she's made a tremendous impact.

We're working with the outreach teams to address the needs of those who are chronically homeless, and collaborating with non-profits, faith-based organizations, businesses, and residents. We're also establishing new relationships with recovery service providers and to date, have helped over 30 individuals enter treatment.

All of these initiatives, all of these accomplishments, are the result of our city coming together to create positive change. We're able to take bold ideas and make them a reality because of the dedication of our community.

We're putting in the work to create equitable futures for our students.

We're putting in the work to help our businesses recover and thrive.

We're putting in the work to build safe neighborhoods and empowered communities.

The state of our city is strong, because our residents are.

I am optimistic about the future, and look forward to the work ahead.

Thank you.